

A Shattered Memory

Written reflection of the documentary film project
Undergraduate Distinction

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Research—Documentary *A Shattered Memory*
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Many things happened during Chinese Cultural Revolution. At first, I wanted to make a documentary film project about a family's memory of the Chinese Cultural Revolution. The family that I chose were not involved in politics, they are more representative of the ordinary students and ordinary workers at that time. Actually they did not care about political things very much; they just cared about how things influenced their lives. Therefore I narrowed down the subject to the memory about the "Down to the Countryside" movement. Fittingly, the members of that family had different experiences during that movement.

It is almost fifty years after the Chinese Cultural Revolution. There are fewer and fewer people who experienced that time. Some of them are too old to remember the things that happened and some of them do not want to talk about their experiences. So I felt like I needed to do this research immediately. I wanted to save the memories of this time period.

However, during the preparation of the project the mother of the Chinese family died. Therefore, the complete memory of the family becomes a shattered memory. Four months after recording the interviews, the father of the big family also died. The death of the mother and the father in that big family is a wake-up call and also defines the purpose and the significance of this documentary. As a film studies student, I need to use my weapon—my camera to defeat time to save the memories of these people.

I did not take a documentary class before I conducted these interviews, and I think after I made this film I do not think documentary is a way to record the truth. During the interviewing process I found that different people have different answers for the same question. Sometimes they did not answer honestly and sometimes they just remembered incorrectly. This documentary is about memory but their memories are not always accurate. The director of the documentary needs to do research and decide what he/her wants to use or wants to show. I also think there is absolutely no

objectivity in documentary filmmaking. . I tried to be objective in my documentary. I did not use my voice asking questions. I wanted to use their voices to create the story of their memories of that time.

I think the mistake that I made along the way is that I did not get enough images and B-roll of the family and their environment. The first reason is I did not realize that B-roll is important. I just asked for some photos of that time, but now I feel that is not enough. Secondly, when I went back to China to interview the family, the mother's body was interred at that time. I did not have the courage to ask them to show me more photos of the family, because the family was not in a good situation at that time. However, I think after this experience I know to make a documentary one needs lots of courage, because sometimes the subject of the documentary is very precious, and sometimes people do not want to talk about it. Therefore, you need to have patience and persistence persuading people to finish their story.

My success is that I did these interviews just in time, and I think I recorded some memories that this family had during the "Down to the Countryside" movement. This is not a political documentary, but a documentary that is concerned with ordinary people's living conditions. And I really recorded many interesting stories of that time period from this family. Beyond the film as it stands now, I have a transcript of the participants' entire interviews. I transcribed the interviews in Chinese and translated the whole script into English. The footage and transcriptions are very precious and I think after I do more research about that period I will edit a new version of the film.

From the different personalities of my participants, I learned many different aspects about the Chinese Cultural Revolution, especially the "Down to the Countryside" movement. At first, I thought the responses to that period would be all negative; however, some of my interviewees gave me some positive answers. So I think this is why some say that the Chinese Cultural Revolution is very complicated. However, looking at it from an overall perspective, it was a twisted period of history. I think most of the ordinary people who experienced that time do not think seriously about this period. They just accept their destiny, and they think no one could avoid that period. I hope this documentary will help an audience understand contemporary

Chinese culture and society more deeply, and at the same time I hope it will help the world see a new perspective of the Chinese Cultural Revolution.

A Shattered Memory <https://vimeo.com/92512197> (Qingge Gao, 2014, 23:12min)

Interviewees: Fuxing

Fulin

Jinxuan

Songchen

Yaxuan

Translator: Yumei Gao

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